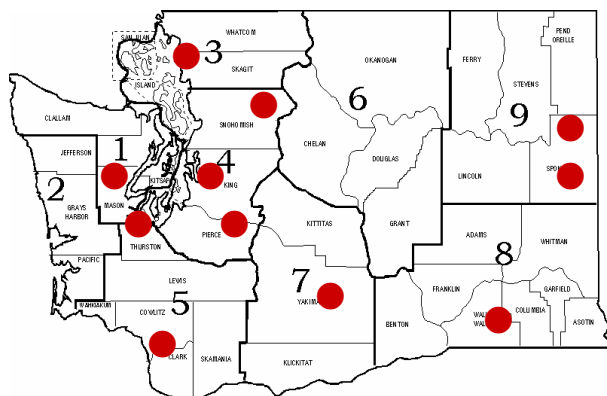


## Juvenile Firesetting Intervention in Washington State

This report represents a five year review of firesetting data in Washington State. Currently, 13 out of 39 counties, representing 84% of the population, are providing intervention services to juvenile firesetters. Some counties provide this service through formal multidisciplinary committees, work groups or service delivery processes. These counties service over 600 children annually in an effort to eliminate inappropriate fire setting behavior.

### Profile of Washington State

68,139 Square miles  
Population 6,041,700  
Urban Population 4,815,072  
Rural Population 1,061,706  
Total Juvenile Population 1,513,843 (26%)  
542 Fire Departments  
39 Counties  
10 juvenile firesetter intervention networks  
serving a population of 5.1million in 13 counties  
(Data Source: Washington State Office of Financial Management)



A recent study showed that most common type of firesetting incident of those referred was fire play with no fire incident 48%. Next, was fire play that resulted in a fire 33%, and a fire that was intentionally set was 11%. Finally, fireworks and making of explosives make up 6% of the referrals. These same studies showed that 70% of the referrals were from fire departments or caregivers, 15% were from courts or counselors and 10-15% were from schools.<sup>1</sup>

### Fire Fatalities

In the last five years, children with access to ignition devices caused 21 fire fatalities. In these fires, often the child that caused the fire died along with another family member.

Juveniles and Fire Fatalities <sup>2</sup>	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	5-Yr Total
Children with Access to Ignition Device	5	7	2	0	7	21
Fire Loss at those fires	Not Available	Not Available	\$85,000	0	\$170,000	\$225,000

<sup>1</sup> Fire Stoppers of Pierce County, Fire Stoppers 2002 Brief, Volume 4, Issue 4, January 28, 2003

<sup>2</sup> Washington State Patrol, Office of the State Fire Marshal, Fire Fatality Report for 2002

Juvenile arson arrests have increased 15% over the past four years. Arson 1 includes arson in occupied buildings and Arson 2 includes buildings that are not occupied. This table does not include Reckless Burning or Malicious Mischief.

<b>Juveniles and Arson</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>5-Yr Total</b>
Juvenile Arson Arrests <sup>3</sup>	267	256	299	317	<i>Not ready</i>	1323
Juvenile Arson Convictions <sup>4</sup> – Arson 1	51	46	67			
Juvenile Arson Convictions <sup>4</sup> – Arson 2	192	133	148			

### **School Fires**

The Office of State Fire Marshal is represented on the Board of the School Safety Center. This is our opportunity to report school fires to the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction and to urge that all school fires be reported to the local fire department so that an investigation can be conducted and that resources can be accessed for youth involved.

The table below represents school fires as reported by local fire jurisdictions to NFIRS (The National Fire Incident Reporting System). The leading ignition sources for school fires are: matches, lighters and incendiary devices. In 2002, 40 of the more than 80 school fires were intentionally set and caused more than \$15 million in losses. The picture to the right is of the Weatherwax School Fire started by youth which caused a \$10 million loss.



*Weatherwax School Fire, Aberdeen, WA  
January 5, 2002*

<b>School Fires<sup>5</sup></b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>5-Yr Total</b>
Fire Incidents in Schools	239	89	66	88	87	569
Fire Incidents in Schools – Fire Loss	----	18,260	\$1,235,275	\$592,250	15,136,529	\$16,982,314
Fire Incidents in Schools—Ignition Source	----	----	----	Match	Cig. Lighter	

### **Fire Investigations**

Fire investigations are critical. “No where is the proper investigation of fire more important than in the area of juvenile-set fires. Research has shown that a juvenile

<sup>3</sup> Washington Association of Sheriffs and Police Chiefs, Crime in Washington 2001 Annual Report

<sup>4</sup> State of Washington, Office of the Administrator for the Courts, Judicial Information System

<sup>5</sup> Washington State Fire Department Incident Data for 2002– National Fire Incident Reporting System

firesetter will be involved with multiple fires before being discovered unless someone intervenes. This intervention is often done by a parent before the behavior results in a fire that requires action by the fire department. However, in those cases where a juvenile-set fire results in a response by the fire department, it is critical that the responsible juvenile be identified in order that future fires can be prevented through appropriate intervention. It has been my experience that juvenile set fires that result in fatalities are rarely the firesetter's first experience with fire, making it all that more important to identify juvenile firesetting activity early."<sup>6</sup>

### **Wildland Fires**

Over the last five years, 182 wildland fires were set by juveniles costing \$330,427. Most wildfires burn in the state's most populated areas. It's not that surprising if you look at the fire statistics for fires that have occurred on DNR protected lands. Over 85% of all fires were caused by people. People start fires, and people can prevent them.<sup>7</sup> Early assessment and intervention is critical. Also critical is information about age-appropriate supervision and fire safety.

<b>Wildland Fires<sup>7</sup></b> <i>WA Dept. of Natural Resources</i>	<b>1997</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>5-Yr Total</b>
Fires Set By Juveniles	37	45	47	27	26	182
Dollar Loss	\$80,288.29	\$46,762.93	\$74,702.73	\$67,937.92	\$60,736.00	\$330,427.87

### **Working Toward a Solution**

Through a project by the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) and a grant from the United States Justice Department the Washington State Fire Marshals Office is forming a multi-disciplinary state juvenile firesetter intervention coalition. This coalition will have representation from the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, the State Fire Marshal's Office, law enforcement, the court system and mental health. This coalition will be working collectively with Fire Stoppers of King County, Fire Stoppers of Pierce County and other local efforts for the purpose of expanding and enhancing youth fire setting intervention programs across the state of Washington.



The State Fire Marshal's Office is spearheading these efforts and is encouraged by the response from local programs. The ability to extend program partnerships across the state will enhance the resources currently available to local programs. It will also provide the opportunity to gather valuable data. A comprehensive data-base was developed by NASFM and other professionals in the field. The

<sup>6</sup> "Hot Issues" Oregon Office of State Fire Marshal, Juvenile Firesetter Intervention Program "The critical role of investigation" by Jeff Howard, Spring/Summer 2002 Vol. 12, No. 2, page 1

<sup>7</sup> Washington State Department of Natural Resources on line at <http://www.wa.gov/dnr/htdocs/rp/prevent.htm>, April 23, 2003

results it will generate will assist everyone in learning more about the complexities that exist with this dangerous and costly behavior. Individual programs will have access to the data base for the purposes of evaluating their local efforts. All of the data will be collected statewide as well to provide a good picture of the issue of firesetting here in Washington State. The State Fire Marshal's office will act as a central collection site for all of the participating programs and will provide our data to NASFM to enhance the national effort as well.

### Workbooks

Fire Stoppers of Pierce and King Counties are offering three publications for use with families of children who have been involved with fire. These workbooks have been developed to meet the need for effective education tools for kids who misuse fire. These books can be used by fire and mental health professionals or others who provide firesetting interventions.

For more information contact:  
Arson Alarm Foundation at  
206-264-3330

*A Family's Response to Firesetting* includes information for caregivers, as well as a plan of action to help them change their child's behavior. It presents factors that contribute to child fire play, and gives adults the information to create a safer home environment while involving children in the process.

*A Workbook for Kids About Fire* is aimed at older children and adolescents. The workbook includes information and activities directed at the older reader, offered in an easy to use way. It helps kids examine fire behavior and its consequences, and empowers them to make positive choices when it comes to the appropriate use of fire.

*A Kids Fire Safety Workbook* was developed for younger children and like the older kid's book, provides information of and activities in an age appropriate manner. Both children's books parallel the parent handbook in a way that allows and encourages caregivers to support the educational process necessary to prevent this behavior.

#### Juvenile Firesetting Intervention Coalition Workshop

September 18 and 19,  
2003 Renton Training  
Center

For More Information  
Contact: 360-753-0435



#### Thanks to our supporters:

- Washington State Council of Firefighters
- Arson Alarm Foundation
- Washington Insurance Council
- National Association of State Fire Marshals



**Firestoppers of Washington** is a Multi-disciplinary Management Team sponsored by the Office of the State Fire Marshal that supports juvenile firesetter intervention efforts in Washington State. For more information contact Karen Jones Deputy State Fire Marshal at (360) 753-0435, e-mail [kjones@wsp.wa.gov](mailto:kjones@wsp.wa.gov) or visit on line at <http://www.wsp.wa.gov/fire/arsonpre.htm>